

Youth Disability and the Post-conflict Justice Reform: A Case Study of Sierra

Leone

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Dedication

- 1 To my wife Juliet, who has been my biggest supporter throughout what seems like unending years of continuous educational pursuits.
- 2 To my late mother Maseray, whose love and dedication to education inspires me not to relent in fulfilling my goals.
- 3 To Professor Gorman, who's indefatigable and resolved effort in seeing her student succeed in their academic pursuits.
- 4 To Professor Sesay, whose salient contributions and unflinching support make this dream a reality.

Finally, this research paper is dedicated to every disabled person in Sierra Leone and Africa, that are continuously ridiculed, and suffer systemic marginalization, social exclusion, bias, discrimination, unfair trial, inequality, and render hopeless and helpless and remain isolated and without consideration for political correctness. Hopefully, this research will draw the attention of stakeholders, society, community organizations, advocates, right groups, and human rights activists to rethink their perception of people with disabilities, and assured them that people with disabilities still have a unique contribution and capabilities to help meet their present and future challenges in their various societies. Any person can become disabled at some point in their life time.

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A Research Analysis of Youth Disability and Post-Conflict Justice Reform: A Case Study of

Sierra Leone

By

Hassan B. Sesay

Abstract

Disabled youth encounter systemic social injustice, social exclusion, social inequality, bias, anti-discrimination, and unjust incarceration within society and the justice system. In Sierra Leone, a developing country emerging from a decade-long civil war (1991-2002), these challenges, attitudes, and perceptions towards disabled people have persisted, despite the implementation of a post-conflict peacebuilding agenda that included justice sector reforms. Although Sierra Leone ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability on October 4, 2010, and the Persons with Disability Act entered into force in March 2011, there remains a challenge in addressing issues affecting disabled people. To date, as a significant number of youth with disabilities roam the streets, the country still lacks an effective mechanism of restorative justice to help those with disabilities in conflict with the law.

The MRP argues that the challenges have persisted in Sierra Leone because of a confluence of social, institutional, and capacity problems which were compounded by the civil war and neglected in post-conflict reform efforts. At the institutional level, Sierra Leone has a weak sociolegal and justice framework, incapable of addressing the welfare and concerns of people with disability, particularly youth who come in conflict with the law. While there are desirable policies and rules at the formal level, the justice system lacks the requisite training, facilities, and resources to uphold the rights of disabled people and its operation often exacerbates their plight. The failure to prioritize these concerns has also meant that societal prejudices, reinforced by poor socioeconomic conditions, have prevailed with little social assistance to families and communities. Since the war ended, successive governments have devoted their limited resources to the pressing issues of security and justice, often at the expense of the concerns and needs of disabled people. This lack of attention to the peculiar needs and circumstances of disabled people

must, however, be placed within the context of a weak post-conflict economy, collapsed infrastructure, and the prevalence of discriminatory attitudes and practices in society. In this context, cultural belief systems and policies which stigmatize disabled people thrive as communities and families look for excuses not to devote their limited resources to society's most vulnerable members.

Introduction

Sierra Leone should deserve commendation for its long struggle of 11 years to establish its stance in bringing a decade-long civil war (1991-2002) to a conclusion and in ensuring major players be held accountable for their heinous crimes perpetrated against the people of that country. Also, it deserves further commendation for advancing the rights of persons with disabilities when compared to other war-torn countries. However, the legacy of systemic neglect, stigma, violence, systemic social exclusion, disregard for principles of transparency and accountability, and the unchecked oppression of youths with disabilities remain an issue to contend. Furthermore, western experience piece of justice, Non-Governmental Organization's leverage, and the disability context of war (it paid very little attention to disability), ableism and poverty, rebuilding the rule of law, institutional capacity and societal problems compounded the challenges and harms confronting people with disabilities in general while post-conflict reform interventions paid limited attention to this category of Sierra Leoneans.

Initially, the one-party/authoritarian rule that dominated the structure of governance in Sierra Leone for the most part after independence in 1961 compromised judicial independence and betrayed the confidence of Sierra Leoneans (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report 2004). As most institutions ended up being affected by authoritarian legacies, one such institution that is most impacted by this form of governance and deprived of its independence to execute its

duties was the judicial system. Accordingly, corruption and manipulation of judges and lawyers by the authorities continue unabated. For instance, Human Rights Watch (2004) claims that “hundreds of criminal suspects, disabled youths and political detainees suffered from extended and unlawful detention, many without the due process of the law as guaranteed and stipulated in the constitution”. Without an appropriate legal framework that will allow persons with disabilities to have access to equitable justice to protect themselves from arbitrary or discretionary detention, the justice system continues to violate instead of protecting youth in conflict with the law.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this research paper (MRP) is to explore the potential and weaknesses of the Sierra Leone justice system to dispense equitable justice following the implementation of a post-conflict justice reform strategy. This MRP examines whether the Sierra Leone justice system is passing out justice equitably when it comes to youth with disabilities and, if not, what is responsible for the lack of sensitivity to the needs of these youths? The paper seeks to identify the dominant narratives within the Sierra Leone justice system to analyze issues that are (in)consistent with the overall objectives of participatory democracy, transparency and accountable governance, acceptable human rights standards, the rule of law, and public services in African countries (Blakesley, 2017). It further assesses Sierra Leone’s compliance with international law, regional and national laws, and standards, respect for the rule of law, human rights and justice. Moreover, the paper identifies the main challenges, constraints, and achievements related to post-war reform processes and then propose improvements that are needed to advance the efficiency and effectiveness of the justice system (Blakesley, 2017).

The paper contends that the current issues facing the people, especially those with disabilities, are more accurately perceived as a spectrum of major social problems and institutional capacity

challenges. One end of that spectrum pertains to absolute neglect and systemic social exclusion of people with disabilities, while the inequitable distribution of national resources occupies the other. In a more recent analysis of the barriers faced by disabled people, economic burden and stigmatization as being amongst the topmost driving factors that have tangible effects on people with disabilities (Grimes et al. 2018). More alarming are the recent links made between societal conditions and youths with a disability, disparities that enable socioeconomic differences to proliferate and intensify regarding the inequitable distribution of resources.

Specifically, prejudice and discriminatory practices against marginalized disabled people in contact with the law pose significant barriers to social inclusion, human rights, and the dispensation of equitable justice. Discriminatory attitudes and practices are historical challenges that increase over time and cause attitudes to become ingrained. A case in point is that those involved in administering, delivering, and enforcing social protection systems are themselves guilty of discriminatory tendencies. In other words, the process itself is rife with replicating historical and cultural trends that have been in existence since independence. The current state of people with disabilities specifically has been shown to have detrimental effects on their physical and mental well-being. It is also disappointing that only little was to systematically assess and address the jolt of all initiatives like programs, policy decisions and services for people with disabilities. The sad reality is that the current conditions faced by disabled youths are due to legacy of objecting to a more nuanced understanding of the multi-layered challenges that impact people with disabilities to live a healthy and self-determined life.

Furthermore, since independence, Sierra Leone continues to face challenges in the area of economic and infrastructural support, a situation further compounded by the decade-long civil war. This massive resource gap in terms of poor access to health care services and other social

amenities like clean pipe-borne water, better roads are pertinent aspects of social deprivation that were uniquely impacted by the bitter experience of war. These infrastructural weaknesses pose serious challenges that continue to threaten the overall well-being of the people. One such challenge is the building of a vibrant justice system with essential infrastructure, resources, and trained personnel. The post-conflict era exposed these weaknesses which emanated from the fact that both authoritarian legacy/rule and the decade long war affected the judiciary to such an extent that people lost trust in the justice system even as they experience rape, torture, forced displacements, abductions, and wanton destruction of public and private property (TRC 2004). Concerns within the justice framework that should have advanced the rights and needs of people with disabilities as these people continue to grapple with marginalization, systemic exclusion, and stigmatization. However, these problems are mutually reinforcing as weak institutional capacity with dire social conditions enable the perpetuation of prejudice and biases as acceptable societal practices with little accountability.

The reality is that society in every African nation struggles to come to terms with the earliest assumption that people with disabilities are less than full humans and therefore are not fully eligible for the opportunities and privileges, state programs, services and policies which are available to other people as a matter of equitable justice. In Sierra Leone, even the post-conflict laws seem to be biased, discriminative and create a systemic barrier to the overall well-being of people with disabilities. Numerous studies affirm that one of the most common outcomes of such neglect is status inequalities, social inequalities, social exclusion, discrimination based on one's circumstances, marginalization, stigmatization, and unending poverty among people with disabilities in general (TRC Report 2004). For post-conflict countries like Sierra Leone, these adverse outcomes may even undermine the fragile peacebuilding process as the aggrieved

community of disabled people remains dissatisfied and resentful of the system. Therefore, the MRP recommends that Sierra Leone should be committed to upholding and safeguarding the rights of persons with disabilities and enable their full participation in society.

The rest of the paper discusses the conceptual frameworks used to view challenges and ways in which disability and post-conflict issues interplay in the political, economic, and social realms of the society. Furthermore, research gaps and policy alternatives that are either currently adopted as a medium to an improved justice system would be analyzed. The conclusion summarizes lessons from the experiences of Sierra Leone and makes recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and future research on this subject. Ensuring that the national strategies promote equitable service and efficient service delivery, there should be a change in policies and subsequent plan of action at all levels of parties involved. That is, both the donors and the government should focus on the betterment of the people they represent. One of the proposed actions is to ensure coordination among stakeholders, particularly coordination between local and national policymakers. A renewed commitment is pertinent to instill pragmatic reforms regarding the present plight of disabled youth and their overall well-being.

Research Purpose and Significant of the paper

The Truth and Reconciliation Committee reported in 2004 that poor control of the judiciary and its sharp decline was one of the elements that contributed to the civil war in Sierra Leone. Since the end of the war, many attempts have been made to reform and control this sector. The government and its development partners are now developing sectoral approaches to re-establish public trust and confidence in the judiciary (M'Cormack, 2018). The main development plan is not based on the various ministries, departments, and agencies involved in the justice sector, but on the general sectors as a whole. Institutional infrastructure has improved slightly (police

buildings, law courts, prisons) and transport and logistics (including essential office supplies and staffing) are now more available compared to the pre-war years. However, despite significant progress, the system still faces inadequate funding, a lack of legal accountability, and a lack of information management and human resources (Horn et al. 2016).

Therefore, my chief aim in writing this paper is to expose and suggest remedies to the historically flawed perceptions that make possible the legal marginalization, stigmatization, discrimination, mislabeling and framing of people with disabilities. Seeing the plight of these people with disabilities, especially young amputees and those suffering from poliomyelitis and other forms of disabilities, triggers my awareness that anyone can become disabling at any time, both naturally and artificially. This paper affirms that disability is real and part of human existence that will continue to be part of human lifestyles for most of humanity's existence.

Besides, this paper is particularly written to impress upon the reader the issues of disability and to problematize lives that are endured by those with disabilities in war-torn countries. Given the massive gap and infrastructural weaknesses in the judicial system as well as weak policies by the government, this paper addresses salient issues affecting youth disabilities, social policies, social justice, social exclusion, and systemic discrimination, while encouraging future researchers and students to critique existing policies and practices. There needs to be greater conceptual clarity around the issue of disability in such contexts, as well as how the law can best accommodate those with physical or mental disabilities. It requires a more energetic dialogue between Disability Studies and Transitional Justice to buttress policy innovation and practice.

Lastly, the paper is to enhance the awareness of society and international stakeholders that disability is not just the defect inside an individual, but as a composite relationship between and people and the community in general who functions differently from the norm. This argument

will lay the foundations for ensuring all youths with disabilities in contact with the justice system have equitable access to the justice system (both formal and informal) and are better served and protected not only by their families but also by the state.

Defining disability

There does not appear to be any concise definition of disability (Stanhope & Lancaster, 2013), which is surprising given the pervasiveness of the phenomenon and the costs shouldered by society when those with disabilities sub-optimally treated. Nonetheless, in keeping with the broad definition set forth by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention(2019), I will summarize disability as any condition that renders an individual incapable of performing ordinary day-to-day functions or activities, or that makes conventional interaction with the broader world impossible (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). A disability can assume the form of a physical, intellectual, psychiatric, visual, hearing, and neurological deficit (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Naturally, disability can be experienced through illnesses, natural disasters or deformity, and artificially through wars and other forms of human activities. A disability could be both severe and prolonged, long term and short term (Denney, 2018). This terminology is pertinent to the overall writing of this paper. In the Sierra Leonean context, it is a new term that addresses issues affecting youth disability in the country.

Another concept which is related to disability is ableism, best described as discrimination or prejudice wherein opportunities and societal awards that favors those who are active people (Denney, 2018). In other words, it is an unfair treatment of people because of their disability status, and that disadvantages them to do things other active people do (Denney, 2018). Disabled youths in Sierra Leone are victims of ableism in that they are denied of the opportunity to make meaningful use of their potentials, when in fairness if given the green light; they could contribute

meaningfully to the development of the country and their overall well-being. The concept of ableism ultimately leads us into a more conceptual discussion that will arise later in this study. Nonetheless, introducing it at this juncture does shed light on how understanding discrimination, even if not in a precise sense, can lead to acute interventions that might resolve the issues Sierra Leone currently faces.

Disability Studies and Transitional Justice

Emerging issues relating to people with disabilities in contact with the justice system is one of the most prevalent concerns in our modern-day society (Graybill, 2017). Berghs (2016) highlights that disabled people are one of the poorest, stigmatized, and most marginalized young people in the world. Researchers estimated 220 million young people with disabilities live worldwide, almost 80% of whom live in developing countries (Berghs, 2016). Observing the mindset of the families, Desrosiers et al. (2020) also note that when a child is born or becomes disabled, his or her family and community often see it as a tragedy and become disoriented as a result of the stigma and economic hardship that the child brings to the family. In many countries, some traditional ideologies relating to the causes of disability, includes curse and infectious diseases, have led to the prevention and isolation of these children and their mothers (Albrecht, 2017). Besides, families often do not prioritize the needs of children with disabilities because of their higher malnutrition, lower immunity rates, and higher incidence of infectious and communicable diseases in children disabled (Desrosiers et al. 2020). The study implies that the problem is somehow inherent in social structures. As Brink (2018) puts it, “many empirical shreds of evidence have accepted it as well, and these negativities that affect youths with disabilities, such as access to education, employment, health care, and social services, affect them in a more complex way” (Brink, 2018 p. 34). Disability-related attitudes and disabilities

make it difficult to attend school, find a job, or participate in ground-based activities. Many rural and urban communities face significant challenges, and physical and communication barriers make it hard to engage in society (van den Brink, 2018).

Dos Santos-Zingale & Ann McColl (2006) posits some salient points addressing the plight of people with disabilities. However, he fails to draw on the neglect by governmental and international institutions in tackling the disreputable predicament of people with disabilities. The majority of the youths, women, and children bear the brunt of disability are as a result of the decade long war in which children between the ages 6 -14 years were recruited as child soldiers, raped, limbs mutilated with some perished (Dos Santos-Zingale & Ann McColl, 2006). Disabled people are seen as an economic burden both by the government and family members and are therefore left to languish in the streets with no hope for their future (Dos Santos-Zingale & Ann McColl, 2006). Moreover, there is little research on the prevalence of disabling youths and the consequences of disability in the context of war and post-conflict reform. According to current data, young people with disabilities face more challenges than older people with disabilities. Haller (2017) highlights that people with disabilities may also face challenges of gender, poverty, race, and status. The aim of this book by Haller titled *Disability Rights Activism Globally* is to highlight the voices, experiences, and observations of young people with disabilities. Haller calls attention to youth disability as they are the targets in violent conflicts. This work aims to fill some gaps in the knowledge of young people with disabilities and raise awareness of the particular problems they face.

Gill and Schlund (2016) used a sample of young people from twelve developing countries who participated in a period of discourse where they shared their thoughts and experiences on several salient issues. The most pertinent instrument in the negotiations was an open-ended

questionnaire developed by Leonard Cheshire for people with disabilities, developed in conjunction with the Youth Disability Group, the United Nations Policy and Development Office, and international NGOs (Gill & Schlund 2016). Under different themes, it accepted that young people with disabilities have the opportunity to discuss the most pertinent areas of development for their lives. These studies have explicitly stated that factors such as education, health and poverty, employment, information, and communications technologies, and participation are not accessible to people with disabilities.

Another survey by MacLachlan et al. (2017) covers 15 WPAY (World Program for Action Youth) priorities and provides opportunities for young people with disabilities to explain how these international issues affect them personally. Respondents were the members of the Young Voice program, which supports groups of 16-25-year-olds, currently supported by Leonard Cheshire Disability and barristers. The members of this group (physical, phonetic, visual, intellectual, and albinism) have many shortcomings; they are all gender and come from different backgrounds. In this way, the consultation process provides an abundance of personal experiences and perspectives (MacLachlan et al. 2017). A total of 75 young people responded to their ideas, stories, pictures, and opinions relating to youth issues in the global economy, their well-being, and young people in the community. The book explores their experiences, recognizes their diversity and successes, and allows them to discuss future challenges and find constructive solutions. The young people who participated in this consultation discussed many areas where they were denied opportunities due to negative attitudes, discrimination, and barriers to entry. Of all the worries that arise, the difficulties that youth with disabilities and young women with disabilities face are most disturbing. Respondents pointed out that gender often limits both

opportunities and disabilities, which is why young women with disabilities struggle with double discrimination.

A study by Ahene et al. (2019) highlighted that youths and young women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to violence and abuse, especially those who have difficulty communicating or expressing their feelings. For example, they intend to identify some of the most significant challenges and how these challenges could be labeled. The main challenges are education, housing, employment, and access to health services, especially HIV and AIDS-related services. Many of the young people who responded described the main barriers that made it difficult to get good grades in school or to access quality health care (Ahene et al. 2019). On a more positive note, many youths with disabilities have described the importance of new technologies, including cell phones and computers, and orthotics, in improving their lives. There seems to be an area where young people with disabilities have made great strides, and in many cases, technology is helping to reduce barriers and create more opportunities for them.

As noted above, various researchers follow a pattern and trend of pointing out major issues affecting people with disabilities such as cultural and traditional differences, stigmatization, exclusion, and economic burden. However, they neglect to explore and discuss civil wars as major determinants that account for increasing disabilities among youth, women, and children. One possible explanation for this trend is that researchers seem to focus or pay siloed attention to their field of study, and areas of interest, thereby neglecting pertinent issues across other disciplines. Besides, most of the researchers tend to solicit funding support for a particular project. As a result, they narrow their research to only the proposal they receive funding to implement. More recent studies on disability studies suggest that not much attention is paid to

people with disabilities since it is seen not only as an economic burden but could not, without doubt, obtain funding researching people with disabilities.

Transitional Justice (TJ) is an approach to systemic or massive violations of human rights that both provides redress to victims and creates or enhances opportunities for the transformation of the political systems, conflicts, and other conditions that may have been at the root of the abuses. TJ is intended to reform and strengthened the justice system during the war-to-peace transition. TJ can take different forms. It could be criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, reparations programs, and other various kinds of institutional reforms. In some countries like Sierra Leone, TJ takes the form of both criminal prosecutions and truth commissions with the multiple objectives of establishing the truth, providing victims a public platform, effectuating institutional reforms, promoting the rule of law by holding perpetrators accountable, and compensating victims in some circumstances. The main objective of transitional justice is to end impunity and establish the rule of law (TRC. 2004).

TJ has focused on victims of violence including child soldiers, women and girls, and displaced communities, but not specifically on people with disabilities or at least not in these terms. Its idea of restorative justice is relevant to Disability Studies. People with disabilities suffer more when governance is authoritarian, and therefore TJ is also helpful to understand how the transition from authoritarian to the democratic rule may impact the welfare of citizens, something that Disability Studies may emulate. One major limitation of TJ, which Disability Studies can help address, is the limited focus on the transition that is always temporal. TJ focuses on justice for victims of political violence and reform of the justice system through its interventions are hardly sensitive to concerns that are specific to people with disabilities.

This literature review has highlighted crucial issues affecting youths with disabilities and explored possible solutions or created room for further research by stakeholders and academicians. The attitude of the international community who ignore policies and practices going on in the developing world towards people with disabilities are what prompt me to explore and expose these weaknesses. The research focuses mainly on the study of youth disabilities and the post-conflict justice reform issues on Sierra Leone justice system and how it dispenses justice against people with disabilities. The research aims to focus on the systemic social stigma, prejudices and stereotyping of the justice system in Sierra Leone and its effects/impacts on disabling youths, by referencing the systemic injustice and gaps that exist base on the standard sets out in traditional beliefs, local and international treaties and the constitution. It will debate how tokenism, ableism, and intersectionality plays a pertinent role in justice disparity and inequality as the main contributing factors to the continued health degradation and impoverished well-being of youths with disabilities in Sierra Leone and other parts of Africa.

Methodology and Research Strategy

My initial aim was to use an emancipator research method that would enable me to visit Sierra Leone to have firsthand knowledge or lived experiences with youths with disabilities. However, this plan was cut short due to the Covid-19. Instead, a search strategy is a pertinent part of the research that I have to explore, as it helped researchers identify powerful methods that can help researchers conduct and produce results (Gill & Schlund 2016). The search strategy used was the key words like disability literature in Sierra Leone, the theoretical framework of Sierra Leone, Youth disability in Sierra Leone. The papers that I contacted included research articles, journal publications, policy papers on the youth disability programs and their evaluation.

The current research strictly adheres to the adaptation and exclusion criteria of this study, as it defines the value, validity, and reliability of the studies examined. Attention focused to how recent the research is, how extensive or comprehensive it is, and the extent to which it addresses the vital issues identified by this researcher as considerable to mapping out an in-depth template for revising extant policies and legal processes for the disabled. Studies that ultimately gain entrance into this literature review are studies that, as Graybill (2017) puts it, provide pertinent and concise details to readers that are easily digested by the audience (Graybill, 2017). Furthermore, all studies that warranted inclusion were studies that contain transparent and detailed research methodology. Having in place an accessible research methodology is efficacious insofar as it helps the reader navigate through the updated data (Grimes et al. 2018).

Ethical Consideration, Analysis and Intersectionality/Barriers

Ethical perspectives are paramount throughout the research process, and as an academic researcher, I follow strict ethical considerations throughout the research process. Drawing from my experience, as a person with a disability, I will focus on the marginalization of those who are deemed burdened by our disability status and interfere with our class or status. I aim to liberate myself from any form of stigmatization and labeling by acknowledging the fact that all persons with disabilities have different experiences and identities. It is through this qualitative and analytic framework that identifies how interlocking system of power affect my situation as an example of one of the most marginalized in the society I currently find myself and aim at creating an awareness of the expectation of the general public, including stakeholders, particularly as I commit to working on those struggles to which race, sex, class, and status are contributing factors of oppression, exclusion, labeling and stigmatization as demonstrated in Sierra Leone.

I decided to share my experience based on the key theme of this course and the Critical Disability Studies program as a whole. I know of my privacy, but I believe my story will contribute to the overall learning strategies for this course and scholars and researchers in Sierra Leone. I was once a hardworking and committed father, believing that through hard work, my family and I will enjoy the fair share of the resources of my country. My primary goal is to trust in a powerful family, including taking care of my family, including my wife and two children, but that dream dashed when I had an accident at my workplace. Within two weeks of my accident, I intersectionally replaced by whiteness and sent on Work Place Safety Insurance Board (WSIB). My income reduced significantly by more than half, and within six months of my accident, my workplace insurance stopped sponsoring me, and at the same time, receives less than half of the income I use to make through the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). Honouring my obligations of caring for my family, paying off my credit cards, bills, and university student loan is problematic. Even though I have disability insurance, it does not cover most medications. I must labour to get the right health instructions that will keep me going. Most of the social activities I used to provide for my family are no more and now count myself to be among the lumpenproletariat or lower end of the economic strata in Canadian society.

The most distressing experience, however, is when on two previous occasions; two white males who once involved in accidents at the same workplace were provided and cared for, and despite their stay away from work, their places kept until they returned to work. As a diverse society, addressing social injustice is a pertinent debate today since this form of intersectional discrimination, being black and located in a racialized community, continues to be an obstacle in addressing justice and inequities in our society. For example, Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) states that the Convention's major purpose is to

promote, protect and ensure the full equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. However, my experience at my former workplace reminds of Kimberlee Crenshaw's intersectionality (1989) and Barbara Smith's The Combahee River Collective Statement (1974), where both feminist women were completely discontent with the way women of color were marginalized, excluded, stigmatized, and discriminated. The most pertinent federal laws which protect people with disabilities from discrimination, including the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Human Rights Act, are far from been utilize equitably, as my case is just one out of the millions of challenges faced by persons with disabilities. It should be aware that not all persons with disabilities face the same challenges. Some individuals cope better with the challenges confronting them, either because of better meta-cognitive strategies or because they have a more robust support structure behind them, while others – chiefly because of class and status - are faced with enormous constraints

I need to include the role of the CRPD in this paper as it gives a clear picture of my position and argument raised in my analysis, even if emotional and personal. However, the case of disabled people of Sierra Leone is different as it does not deal with race, but status and class. Tradition and economic factors are the most hurtful for people with disabilities in that setting. The disabled women in Sierra Leone often speak about marginalization and exclusion, which is rooted in the social fabrics of the Sierra Leonean society (Ovadiya & Zampaglione, 2009).

Historical and Institutional Context

This background is to give the reader a vivid and succinct picture of the country that this paper is exploring in terms of historical context, as well as addressing and critiquing disability issues. The country Sierra Leone is situated on the West Coast of Africa. Sierra Leone has a tropical climate

with a diverse environment ranging from savanna to rainforests; it has a total of 71,740 km² (27,699sq miles) and a population of 7,092,113 as of the 2015 population census. Sierra Leone is precious with fertile soil for agriculture, and several minerals and natural products like a diamond, gold, bauxite, rutile, piassava, cocoa, with a diamond as the main income-earning product of the country. However, one would ponder whether this blessing is a curse or a reason for its backwardness since the country is one of the most impoverished countries in the world. For an unspecified period, the country was under one-party rule, dominated by the All People's Congress Party (APC), and orchestrated many conflicts, divisions, torture, and injudicious killings. However, due to the wave of democratic reforms in the 90s and pressure from western powers, the country averted to the multi-party system of governance, paving the way for the establishment of the 1991 constitution. This Constitution is presently in use and is governing the guidance of the country (MacLachlan et al. 2017).

The judicial system in Sierra Leone is a branch of the Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone and is responsible for the interpretation and application of Sierra Leone law to ensure fair justice by law and to provide a means of redress. The Constitution guarantees the independence of the Judiciary. The judicial system, chaired by the Chief Justice of Sierra Leone, consists of inferior courts represented by the district, the district court and the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court of Appeal (Berghs, 2016). In theory, it is well and good to learn about the independence of the judiciary, but in practice, the judiciary is seen as the worst branch of government and is responsible for thousands of lives lost and incarcerated. The judiciary is seen as one of the key players to the decade long civil war in Sierra Leone (TRC Report 2004), a conflict that was characterized by indiscriminate killings of civilians and deliberate targeting of women through rape and other sexual violence, widespread conscription of child soldiers and

campaigns of mutilations, amputations, and other serious atrocities committed against innocent civilians.

Sierra Leone suffered a series of the military coup with some successful and others unsuccessful. Many notable and promising people lost their precious lives during these periods. In 1991, armed conflict broke out in the country, and it was marred by indiscriminate killing of civilians, conscription child soldiers, violating people's rights to freedom, hacking off limbs, and causing thousands of people to flee the country for their safety. The war also caused many women and children to be victims of rape and sexual violence (van den Brink, 2018).

The war lasted more than ten years, from 1991 to 2002. As initially stated, people with disabilities suffered the most brunt of the war with youth as the overall victims. Two transitional justice programs established to ensure accountability for human rights violations. These are the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Committee and the Special Court for Sierra Leone. The Truth Committee has completed its mandate and published a report on its findings and proposals which the Special Court prosecuted those who bore the most eminent responsibility for atrocity crimes (Njelesani, 2019).

Sierra Leone has experienced considerable political unrest and recession, which eventually led to brutal armed conflicts lasting more than a decade (March 1991 to January 2002). The social and economic impact of decades of chaos is devastating. An estimated 50,000 or more people killed, and thousands injured and become disabled or abused. More than 2 million people fled or displaced (500,000 fled to neighbouring countries) (Zack-Williams & Riley, 1993). A large number of artisans moved to Freetown and left the country, destroying much of the country's entire workforce. Much of the country's social, economic, and physical infrastructure is damaged. Municipal social and productive infrastructure, such as markets, shops, factories,

agriculture, and community service centres, has been completely dismantled. The seat of power and commerce, which is capital Freetown, brought down to its knees with businesses looted and infrastructures burnt beyond repairs. There was a systemic campaign of mutilations, amputations, and other inhumane atrocities committed against innocent and defenseless civilians. It was during this period that the country recorded its highest disability populations.

During the worst period of these internal conflicts, civil and political rights collapsed, with no economic activities, and causing major human rights abuses. However, following the Lomé Peace Agreement, supported by multi-stakeholder disarmament and reunification programs, a final disarmament initiative took place between May 2001 and January 2002. There were a total of 72,490 fighters among the armed men, and 71.0 per cent were armed. The rebel war ended on January 18, 2002. By February 2004, more than 56,000 or more ex-combatants had received support through rehabilitation and reintegration programs to help them rejoin society (Hoffman, 2004). It is the first step in this long process known as the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) of all combatants, including those conscripted as child soldiers. Despite the challenges of disarming these combatants, the program itself was successful and is a necessary precondition for peace in Sierra Leone through considerable support and commitments from both national and international stakeholders (Hoffman, 2004). Rehabilitation, settlement, and reconstruction programs support the lives of refugees and returnees in their communities. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) initiated to treat wounds and hurts from the war. Two years later, the Committee successfully resigned in June 2004 (Chohan, 2018). In 2003, an UN-funded special tribunal introduced to prosecute those most responsible for igniting the war. The trial began and scheduled to end in 2008. While those responsible for coordinating the war were tried and some imprisoned, many of those at the lower strata got pardoned and were

roaming the streets of Freetown, despite the bitter memories from the victims they have forced to become disabled (Chohan, 2018).

Most importantly, as one can well imagine, the children who have been physically and mentally scarred by war – much less those disabled youth born into long-term social conflict and debasement – have been the most pitiful and tragic victims of Sierra Leone's flawed and suspect legal and political architecture. Without appropriate mechanisms in place to prevent abuse, abandonment, or exploitation, it is easy to see why so many children run away, get orphaned, get hurt, pregnant, become dropouts, physically disabled by hacking their limbs, and get unsettled for life. Most of these now disabled youths were conscripted as child soldiers and doubtlessly drawn into conflicts for which they have no bearing. Children have suffered and forcefully made to be the perpetrators of the atrocities suffered by most people. Many were abducted, drugged, and forced to fight. The rebels raped and abused women by conscripting them as sex slaves who later conceived and gave birth to fatherless children. A large number of unaccompanied children have travelled to Freetown, and many are out on the streets doing business (Szántó, 2019). Apart from the war as a pertinent reason for the increase in disability in Sierra Leone, disability is generally on the rise in Sierra Leone and across the world due to abject social conditions. According to the WHO (World Health Organization), 15% of the global population lives with one form of disability or more today. In 1970, only 10% of the world population lived with a disability (Hawking, 2011).

In May 2008, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) entered into force and marked a milestone in the history of disability. People now understand the physical boundaries of people with disabilities compared to the physical barriers, organizations, and attitudes that create an unbalanced society. Today, CPRD presents substantial opportunities for

people with disabilities to broaden their potential and support all their efforts to achieve full integration. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities encourages the making of changes and the adoption of new measures, including legislative measures, to achieve the full and equal participation of people with disabilities in life and society (Szántó, 2019). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities covers all civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, including the right to education, employment, health, health, justice, living rights, and the right to liberty, personal mobility, and participation in the right to the action. The government emphasized that all development should encompass and benefit people with disabilities and should be the first international human rights agreement to meet this requirement (Bird, 2019).

Post-conflict Institutional Capacity

In theory, Sierra Leone as a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) is expected to recognize that persons with disabilities should be presumed to have legal capacity on equity and equal bases with others in all aspects of their lives. In addition, reasonable accommodation is also expected to serve as a guide to persons with disabilities and eradicate or reduce undue burden on them, and their legal rights respected. In addition, an inclusive approach to their location is recognized. But the reality is that people with disabilities are perceived differently in the Sierra Leonean society (Aenishänslin, Asmara & Magnusson, 2020). The government sees disability as an economic burden, whereas society stigmatizes labels, discriminates, isolates, and perceived people with disabilities as evil, incapable, and unhealthy to be part of society. They are at the lowest economic strata, restricted, deprived, be the last always, and socially and culturally excluded in society. Youth with disabilities suffer

from significantly higher rates of the unemployment accessibility issue and earn up to between 70 to 80 percent less than those without a disability (Aenishänslin, Amara & Magnusson, 2020).

However, Marcus et al. (2017) stated that awareness-raising and communication could be one of the most important areas. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and its optional protocol is a good platform for people with disabilities around the world to express their rights requirements. It was adopted on December 13, 2006, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York and was opened for signature in March 2007. More and more countries are signing and ratifying the treaty, and young people with disabilities are playing a key role in strengthening the treaty. Reports from many countries, including Sierra Leone, demonstrate that young people with disabilities have worked hard to strengthen the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Young people are taking the opportunity to create an all-inclusive society, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is a key tool for opening new doors (Marcus et al. 2017). Most countries today, including Canada, Australia, and the United States recognizes that persons with disabilities should enjoy and have access to legal rights and legal capacity on an equal basis with others in all aspects of life. Persons with disabilities should have the right to respect for his or her mental and physical integration on an equal basis with others (Marcus et al. 2017). A study by Beoku-Betts (2019) highlighted that youth and young women with disabilities face more challenges than adult men and women, and it is easy to see how sensitive they are towards their disability and lack of power to contribute in the social and political structure.

The psychological impacts are also significant. Youths and Women with disabilities do not have the same opportunities as adult men and women with disabilities or even their peers. One of the problems that youths with disabilities talk about is that their freedom and access (i.e., the ability

to move, dress, eat, choose their friends freely) are more restricted than that of adult men and women. For example, families often protect a woman, which significantly affects their quality of life. However, the biggest concern is the risk of abuse and exploitation. Many young women with disabilities around the world are telling stories of sexual violence, accidental pregnancy, abuse, neglect, social exclusion, and departure (Beoku-Betts, 2019).

Furuzawa (2018), in its study, pointed out many risk factors that young people with disabilities point out. For example, young women and women with disabilities are often unable to talk about sexual or physical violence due to a lack of strength or voice. Their voices are hardly heard in the court system in Sierra Leone. They are seen as gold diggers trying to make money through manipulative means. It may be advanced that neither the government nor civil societies take their complaints and concerns seriously. To elaborate more fully, there are both anecdotal and empirical stories of disabled people (even young people) being unable to secure homes because landlords do not want them, chiefly because it is widely assumed that they lack the means to make monthly rental payments (Berghs, 2016). The same such sources also make it plain that disabled people are often not the recipients of bank loans or lines of credit because of the widespread belief they will not be positioned to pay back any outstanding debts (Berghs, 2016).

Finally, disabled young people are frequently deprived of a means of gainful employment because so many of the occupations within Sierra Leone require robust physical labour, or because businesses and work stations are really not equipped to accommodate those with disabilities (Berghs, 2016). And all of this, sadly, does not even begin to take into account the extreme vulnerability that the disabled face, both at home or in the workplace, as it pertains to sexual exploitation (Furuzawa, 2018).

It must also be emphasized that young men and women with disabilities are often unable to talk about sexual or physical violence due to a lack of strength or voice. Their voices are hardly heard in the court system in Sierra Leone. They are regarded as gold diggers trying to make money through manipulative means. They are the underdogs or outcasts when it comes to dispensing justice; neither the government nor civil societies take their complaints and concerns seriously. In an interview with soccer players, they explained the impact of disability. One of them states that “during the time I was not playing football, I was marginalized,” and “people normally say because we are disabled, we are good for nothing” (Umaru Samdy, 20, Bo City, Sierra Leone).

Over the years, perceptions toward disabled people have varied significantly within various communities in Sierra Leone. The major issues that persist are the significant number of youths with disabilities roaming the streets, especially in the capital Freetown. The lack of effective mechanism or restorative justice mechanisms to help youths in conflict with the law also poses a serious concern. These prejudices and stereotypes that have been directed towards young people with disabilities, including disabled women and children who are mostly at high risk of becoming disabled due to armed conflict (child soldiers) or general unrest, have completely erased the most important issues of ethical consideration and experiences of youths, young women and children with disabilities. The main concerns, however, are the continued existence of unequal opportunities (systemic social inequality), the obstacles created by policymakers denying disabled youth to explore and accomplish their goals, the lack of belongingness, acceptance, and recognition of individuals. In this context they are characterized as underprivileged groups (socially excluded) and systematically denied full access and blocked from resources that are normally available to all members within the society (though inadequate in the Sierra Leone context). Thus, creating fundamental concerns to social integration and

observance of human rights violations, young disabled within the Sierra Leonean society and in most other African societies are suffering from the lack of opportunities.

When the Special Court was instituted to expose perpetrators responsible for the decade long war, and identify victims, (contravening the blanket amnesty agreed upon), there was a glimmer of hope for the people who desire lasting peace. This also gives a glimmer of hope and relief to the amputees and other civilians who suffered an unprecedented scale of violence and human rights abuses. However, the hope of addressing the decade long civil war through transitional justice (i.e. moving from violence and repression to a more stable society) is far from being realized. One reason for this is that political greed, desire and thirst for power, make it impossible for the people of Sierra Leone to develop social trust, examine the justice system, bank on democratic principles and governance, and rebuild a broken society and justice system, and scrutinize their actions in time of conflict.

Also, the alienation of youths with disabilities after the war creates a serious vacuum of reintegration into society. These marginalized youths became frustrated, violent, sad, and mentally deranged (Leao, 2009). As a result of this societal neglect, their only hope of survival is either begging for their survival or engage in criminal activities. In turn, the root cause of their problem is neglected, even within the justice system. Unfortunately, most of these youths are crammed in prisons around the country, and those fortunate to survive could not find shelter (Leao, 2009). It is the responsibility of the government to foster social change and to promote equity for people with disabilities, and shape their future and the social system to ensure they stand up and stand out through capacity building programs, such as employment options through vocational rehabilitation (Leao, 2009).

In response to this varying need, the Sierra Leone government and the justice system, just like other justice systems in underdeveloped countries, has sought to offer training in cultural competences to those dispensing justice (Leao, 2009). While the training and expansion of the court system (both local and formal) are vital to the bridging of justice disparities against youths with disabilities, several studies suggest that the justice system in Sierra Leone has shown weaknesses and neglects in its attempt to eliminate these disparities (TRC 2004). Most of the studies that promote the idea of equitable justice are based on data that were developed and compiled decades ago. The country lacks more up to date research that can provide a deeper understanding of the systemic injustice phenomenon in the current court system in the country. A country that is expected to envision a society in which every person including the disable should live a healthy and self-determined life (TRC 2004).

Prevailing Societal Norms, Attitudes, and Practices

There are a host of societal issues and normative values that complicate justice for the disabled. Widespread illiteracy (and a concomitant lac of formal education) is a serious matter, and this confounds efforts to identify, conceptualize, and address disability because of the resultant lack of appropriate human resources and professional tools for resolving the problem. Additionally, even as we introduce various theories of human rights as a basis for understanding existing economic, legal, and social rationales for inclusion, we must recognize that ongoing systemic barriers (the foundational blocks of systemic oppression), and persistent biases and misconceptions have thwarted the establishment of goodwill toward those with handicaps or mental/physical deficits. It is important to understand the multi-generational perpetuation of group biases and prejudices, a troubling acceptance of unequal treatment before the law, and the still fitful transition of the domestic culture away from violence and criminality. As such, it will

create a clear sense of the day to day challenges facing the society. Seeking to respond to the uniqueness and divergent needs of these minority groups is thus a challenging endeavor that seems to be almost impossible.

The most prevalent terminologies used by the general population for disabled individuals are crippled, evil, demon, deaf, blind, and witchcraft. There was no place for youths with disabilities. Most disabled youths/children are labeled, stigmatized, and socially isolated and excluded, and in most cases returned to the bush and left to die and rot, as a means of satisfying the gods (Nuwagaba & Rule, 2015). This is due to strong traditional beliefs and idol worshipping, especially by people residing in the hinterland. In fact, in most cases, mothers had to abandon their kids for fear of isolation, labeling, and stigmatization. They most often are labeled as evil, and some are even banished from the towns. There was no governmental support for parents carrying disabled kids neither supports for the kids. The government sees disabled people as a burden and liabilities and not assets and would not want to invest in such people. They believe that disabled youths have no future.

This is the reason why the only notable schools for disabled kids in the seventies, eighties, and nineties were The National School for the Deaf and The National School for the Blind that existed before the war. These schools were located in the capital city only. There is no hope for kids born in the provincial towns and villages since formal education hardly advanced in the hinterlands. The 10-year conflict in Sierra Leone could be seen as a blessing for disabling youths, children, and adults, as it brought about disability awareness through the intervention of external humanitarian groups, advocacy groups, human rights groups, and the United Nations. It also brought about chaos, for it has disrupted the criminal justice infrastructure, including the police, the Judiciary, and the prisons. The loss of human lives, properties and creates enormous

increased in disabilities. However, sustainable reforms have given these sectors strength and legislation, and innovations in civil society have brought Sierra Leone to the level of the criminal "Justice System" before the onset of the conflict (Sesay, 2019).

The Sierra Leone government and other Human Rights institutions have failed in their attempt to set out the context in which experiences of disabled youth occur with an emphasis on the contributions of social and structural factors and then make a case for resolving some of the systemic and unending barriers undermining the justice system through several policies and policy frameworks. Most of these interventions dealing with disabled youths are based on the representations and assumptions explored above. There is a long history of the Sierra Leone government in collaboration with international bodies, to improve the situation of justice in the country. However, some of the policy implications are based on international literature and case scenarios of other countries and organizations such as the United Nations. It is pertinent for the government to urgently address these factors that affect the risk of developing an equitable justice system. It is shown throughout research that disabled youths are more likely than the general population to be exposed to social factors that enhance the likelihood of suffering in the hands of the justice system.

In Sierra Leone, there is considerable increase in violence and incarceration of youth with disabilities in the prisons systems. Current policies being conceptualized base on four main social risk factors including armed conflicts, violence, and cultural as well as social barriers (Tamashiro, 2011). One such factor could be attributed to exposure to armed conflicts and continue violence. It is indicated that increased exposure to armed conflicts (as in the case of Sierra Leone), increases the likelihood of developing physical and mental disabilities. Also, armed conflicts lead to suffering from health issues such as depression, chronic anxiety,

substance abuse, and mental health which in turn could lead to suicidal ideation among other outcomes that could easily trigger crimes against humanity. In the case of Sierra Leone, stakeholders seek to resolve some of the cultural barriers that encourage armed conflict and violence through cultural integration and developing a better understanding of the impact of conflict and its implications on society. Policies have also sought to resolve issues affecting people with disabilities. Issues such as stigmatization, social isolation, and negligence by those in authorities, pave the way for the burden of fear of injustice against people with disabilities, arising from the justice system. When we mentioned about the various ways people could become disability, conflict is the most prevalent. Other sources include illnesses, natural disasters and deformity, and artificially through wars and other forms of human activities. Disability is real and is part of human existence that will continue to be part of human's lifestyles on the earth.

This justifies the fact that disabled people suffer unjust victimization and inhumane treatments as their plight is least thought of; their lives are devalued, stigmatized as criminals, viewed as sickly, and seen as a burden and unproductive to government and society. The consequences for children of this long-standing conflict are serious. Many children run away, get orphaned, get hurt, get pregnant, become dropouts, physically disabled by hacking their limbs, and get unsettled for life. Most of these now disabled youths were conscripted as child soldiers and easily drawn into conflicts for which they have no bearing. Children have suffered and forcefully made to be the perpetrators of the atrocities suffered by most people. Many were abducted, drugged, and forced to fight. The rebel raped and abused women by conscripting them as sex slaves who later conceived and gave birth to fatherless children. A large number of

unaccompanied children have traveled to Freetown, and many are out on the streets doing business (Szántó, 2019).

Although the level of juvenile delinquency is not high when compared to other countries in Africa and beyond, it is increasing due to the extreme rate of poverty, greed, politics, and neglect from all walks of life, including the governments (Maxted, 2003). This was enormously increased after the conflict after most infrastructures destroyed. There were no organized structures for youths and unemployment and dropouts the order of the day. Those youths that manage to attain university, college, or technical education continue to languish in the streets with no opportunities for employment (Veeken, 1994). What will be the fate of disabling youth then? Unfortunately, civil war has almost collapsed in the youth justice system (Bird, 2019).

Disabled Youth and the Criminal Justice System

Analysis of crime trends over the last four years is a cause for concern. Interestingly, this includes an increase in some of the worst crimes, including murders and abductions. The number of crimes has also increased (Maxted, 2003). The Sierra Leone Police Department (SLP) has offered several possible explanations for increasing minor crimes, including high unemployment, the impact of the global recession, and inadequate police and community cooperation. Little has changed in the way statistics are collected (Munro et al. 2017). Unfortunately, this department turned out to be among the most corrupt institution in the world, as they focused more on enriching themselves at the expense of the defenseless and already improvised population (Munro et al. 2017).

Bearing this in mind, disable youths are the scapegoats and are completely excluded and isolated in society, and they are the most incarcerated. No particular race, gender, or age can help the police find plans to protect vulnerable groups. Since 2000, the government has completed several

major reforms to increase the protection of vulnerable groups, especially women and children, including the establishment of a Family Support Unit (FSU) as a police force. Sexual violence and cruelty towards women and children are prevalent (Schneider, 2019).

There are some laws in Sierra Leone that directly address disability issues. These include the Sexual Offenses Act 64 and the Access to Information Act. Paragraph 65 Article 4 of the Education Act recognizes the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of disability. 66. In the first paragraph of Article 1, Article 8 of the Sexual Offenses Act provides that "[a] person has knowingly caused, encouraged, threatened or deceived another person into engaging in sexual activity" .67 Offenders may be convicted. Hence "at least five years and not more than fifteen years." .68 Section 74 (1) (1) of the 2012 Public Elections Act provides that voters with visual or physical disabilities may vote. This rule requires visually impaired or physically disabled voters to contact the polling station director, who assists physically disabled voters or advises visually impaired voters to fingerprint. A box that corresponds to the candidate's '69 he wishes to vote for. In the third paragraph. Article 11 The Access to Information Act states that content must be categorized according to the needs of people with disabilities (Furuzawa, 2018).

Even though the international community played a significant role in ending the conflict in Sierra Leone, their troops joined in at the wrong time. The international contingent entered the conflict when Sierra Leone's government forces were factional, so it was difficult for UN troops to properly coordinate military maneuvers and hold strategic positions. Moreover, the majority of the troops lack an understanding of the culture of Sierra Leone, creating a barrier to maintaining proper coordination. The Lomé agreement, like the fallen peace treaty in Sierra Leone, gives all combatants grace for all crimes committed during the conflict. It also offers strong political views from African Terrorism Committee / RUF leaders.

Instead of being prosecuted for this crime based on military obligations under a network agreement, cases were initiated to set up a Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC). The plight of disabled youths was ignored and not given serious consideration despite using them at the Special Court to investigate and prosecute the atrocities committed by the warring faction. The UN spokesman for the peace talks shared his doubts about the network agreement, noting that the allegations do not apply to international crimes (Denney, 2018). The UN Secretary of Human Rights argues that peace and kindness are incompatible. International non-governmental organizations are also opposed to "worldwide" prosecution and are demanding internal prosecution. After the rebels seized 500 UN peacekeepers in May 2000, the UN Secretary-General said that Foday Sankoh (RUF Leader) had recently been responsible for the crisis in Sierra Leone, and citing its importance in assuming responsibility for the maintenance of lasting peace, the President of Sierra Leone announced that Foday Sankoh was involved in the trial; the finance minister said the government would prefer Foday Sankoh to be tried by an international court because the home court cannot guarantee security (Denney, 2018). During this period, countless youths and child soldiers sustained injuries, which render them disabled to date. However, the end of the civil war in Sierra Leone was the main reason why both the RUF leader Foday Sankoh and the then President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah signed a peace agreement without any further complications or preconditions.

Civil society calls for the establishment of an international court. ²⁰ On June 12, 2000, almost a year after the Network Agreement was signed, President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah signed a letter with the UN Secretary-General asking him to do so. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) members responsible for cruelty have been brought to trial due to the atrocities committed during the war. The President acknowledged in the letter that "Sierra Leone does not have the resources

or expertise to prosecute such crimes" and that it is "crime in Sierra Leone because it does not understand such crimes." "On August 14, 2000, the Security Council asks the UN to negotiate with the Sierra Leone government to create a special court. The UN and the Government of Sierra Leone reached agreement on the establishment of a Special Tribunal Agreement on January 16, 2002 (Graybill, 2017). Most of the amputees jubilate and hoping for a lasting justice for their unjust suffering and human rights abuses meted out against them.

The Court is, therefore, a body of international treaties. Neither the UN nor the government has denied the accusations made in the treaty, despite claims to the contrary: the United Nations has never considered it important to establish international law, not only for national courts, at least until 2007. The trial began on June 3, 2004, with three former CDF leaders, including Sam Hinga Norman. On July 28, 2004, lawsuits against three former RUF leaders continued. On March 29, 2005, the three former AFRC leaders were the subject of a third trial. Further trials are possible if the Special Court arrests two defendants: former AFRC commander Johnny Paul Koroma and former Liberia President Charles Taylor alleged AFRC / RUF assistant. Theoretically, a new payment could be issued, although it is unlikely due to limited financial support and time (Tom, 2017). However, Taylor (the former Liberian head of state) was tried in the Netherlands and is now serving his sentence.

The most common crimes reported to FSU are domestic violence following sexual and child abuse. Unlike domestic violence, rape has not been legally altered. Harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation, child marriage, and trafficking, continue to affect vulnerable groups of women and children (Horn et al. 2016). However, youths with disabilities are still at the lower end of the strata. More awareness and advocacy to identify issues facing these youths should be instituted. Drawing from some of the explanations posits thus far, the Sierra Leone Police

Services determines to be one of the most corrupt, ill-equipped, corrupt, and dangerous institutions in the country (International Monetary Fund, 2016). Since the Civil War, recent SLP reforms have increased their ability to develop effective crime prevention and public confidence-building measures (Schmider, 2019). However, the SLP is still inadequate to maintain transparency, and more civilians need to be involved in local police operations. Since 2002, police abuse has decreased up to 19%, and the percentage of citizens satisfied with the entry of police officers has increased by 10% (Culp, 2007). Repeated reports of physical abuse, unlawful assessment, and illegal detention undermine the credibility of the SLP (M'Cormack, 2018). The lack of appropriate equipment, poor response times, and delays in investigations reduce the ability of the SLP to prevent and reduce crime.

The FSU must also receive adequate training and additional funding for its activities. Poor service conditions are still considered a key factor in the persistence of corruption and the evaluation of illegal costs in the SLP. Sheriff's salaries are particularly low. They pay an income that the District Court collects in the form of a fine. SLP has a Complaints Department, Disciplinary, and Internal Investigation (CDIID) (Naso, Bulte & Swanson, 2020). All these factors account for the ineffectiveness of the police. The department is responsible for handling and investigating public complaints about police abuse and, in some cases, disciplines police officers. Penalties include a reduction, fine, penalty, or two weeks of medical training. In the case of more serious violations, you can take action. Although public discipline is subject to general discipline, the number is low. The transparency of CDIID can be improved. Except for robbery, most people who commit crimes are still relatively ill. In some places, community watchdogs are in place to report a crime or arrest civilians (Ahene et al. 2019). Most of the victims or culprits ended up becoming disabled with less care if fortunate to live. The cells and

prisons are dilapidated and unfit for human habitation. Most prisoners ended up developing mental health issues. The number of private companies is also exponentially throughout the country.

However, thieves' violence is problematic in the country, and despite been reported, it is a widespread problem throughout the country. The Constitution guarantees the right to a fair trial, though, in practice, this has often violated through the excessive detention and unfair trials, the extension of probation, the law on unjust punishment, and the unlawful exploitation of the poor (Marcus et al. 2017). The 2010 Preliminary Legal Aid Bill is already in the Cabinet and is awaiting Parliament's decision. Hopefully, with the adoption of the Assistance Act in 2010, some of these issues will improve. Although few people speak English fluently in the country, there is an enormous shortage of interpreters at all levels of the higher courts, and they are gradually disappearing. The main reason for the delays in the Justice System is the electoral system provided for in Chapter 108 of the CPA. The primary purpose of the operation of the intellectual property system is to prevent irrelevant or unfounded litigation in the Supreme Court, because if the evidence is too weak to justify an indefinite extension of the law, the judge may dismiss the accusation until the accused can file an indictment until the trial (Beoku-Betts, 2019).

Despite the original goal, the system caused significant delays in the study. It also led to a duplication of cases where witnesses had to repeat their testimony and testify in the case before the Supreme Court. Preservation of the preservation PI has added to the prison system. With this in mind, youth with disabilities have to contend with whatever decision the Court imposes on them.

After release, PI will have a maximum retention period of 28 days, during which time the sheriff must send the case to the Supreme Court if the evidence is available (Furuzawa, 2018). Disable

youth bears the brunt of possible penalties as their impoverished economic status contributes to their unjust incarceration. Under the Sierra Leone (CPA) Criminal Procedure Act of 1965, which includes the death penalty, imprisonment, and fines has also been used to criminalize the livelihood of youth with disabilities. Some offences provide for penalties while others do not, but the time of the sentence is awaiting the judge. The most pertinent crimes, including murders, robberies, and riots, should be subjected to the death penalty. Except for the most serious offences, most offences can be fined, and failure to pay will lead to imprisonment (Ainley et al. 2016). Despite higher penalties for many offences in official courts, these penalties are rarely used. Public courts are often subject to inconsistent convictions and differences between the well to do or rich and the vulnerable people, including young women, disable youths and young people. Civil society's efforts to legally abolish the death penalty have not worked well. Civil society groups, including Prison Watch, are calling for a reform of criminal sanctions to include provisions for other awards. Currently, most violations offer fines or penalties. Therefore, most prisoners are impoverished citizens. Civil service and compulsory attendance at curricula can be practical opportunities for minor crimes. However, the CPA currently under review is considering a different judicial system (Blakesley, 2017).

Conclusion and recommendations for policy, practice, and future research

Bringing new insight on disability and access, through the personal narrative as a man with a disability and writing a paper in search of my educational pursuits, this MRP has examined issues related to access to justice for youth with disabilities in post-conflict Sierra Leone. While the Global North countries such as Canada, The United States of America, and Australia, are technologically advanced, well developed, rich or wealthy, and politically stable, countries in the Global South are opposite, as they represent economically backward countries and often

politically and culturally marginalized. Examples of these countries include those in Africa, Latin America, and part of Asia. Even though there remain challenges for disabled people in the Global North, they enjoy some form of economic, social, and political autonomy. Disability very seriously considered here, and new legislations most often passed to advance the overall improvements of people with disabilities. The Court, too, is working assiduously to dispense justice to persons with disabilities. Unlike the Global south, where disability continues to pose significant challenges for persons with disabilities, including youths. There is hardly a duty to accommodate, and biases and neglect are most prevalent in that part of the world.

Sierra Leone has gone through a painful history, and its legal and judicial system has left an indelible ink and fresh scar on the minds of this dark past. Progress has already been made in improving the Judiciary and will continue since the end of the civil war in 2002, but much remains to be done to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and support of the system for integration of peace, democracy, and development in Sierra Leone (Koko, 2019). But through the assistance of the international communities and the United Nations, transitional justice mechanisms were able to prosecute those responsible for the many atrocities perpetrated against the people of Sierra Leone. Hopefully, this will eliminate the risk of further violence and allow Sierra Leone to recover and move towards an equal society governed by law.

However, promoting lasting peace and credibility will not succeed unless other measures taken on behalf of the government and the international community to promote lasting transformation and put an end to local corruption and bad governance particularly where the courts have proved ineffective. Only the long-term commitment of the local authorities, together with international assistance, will ensure a transition from war and violence to an environment conducive to personal development and a high standard of living. The international community cannot ignore

the fact that to play a lasting role in intervening in achieving justice, poverty must be eradicated, and development promoted. International parties that have contributed to the country's economy in recent years may need to review large-scale financial flows in the future, which could seriously jeopardize stability economically and can lead to increased poverty and high population numbers (Graybill, 2017).

Poverty reduction enables people to participate in social and political reforms; it also reduces public suffering and easily promotes the political agenda of opportunistic and corrupt elements of society. Justice is a question of equality. Courts can help achieve the goals of interim justice by increasing public confidence in the will of society to treat people fairly and equitably. If it is transparent, it can show the Sierra Leone community how to operate a neutral “Justice System” that includes due process and impartiality but helps to escape the past. If Sierra Leoneans are able to identify a party in the process, it will go in the right direction to promote temporary justice in Sierra Leone. The Special Court condemned the terrible practices that have been in place in the Sierra Leoneans for the last decade and hopes to prevent them and to restore respect for the law. The historical narrative of the judiciary and the Truth and Reconciliation Committee draws the public's attention to the seriousness of the atrocities committed, which in turn could contribute to social and political reforms that are compatible with the protection of human rights. The rule of law the Truth Committee and the Conciliation Committee have identified the roots of war. It is now up to the government to ensure that justice in the Provisional Law does not remain provisional (Albrecht, 2017). Police need more funding and training in investigative techniques, human rights, and criminal justice. Disability awareness and training should be mandatory to execute their work with equity. Also, a formal monitoring system should be put in place to ensure that suspects and prisoners are properly treated. Despite recent improvements, police

training remains inadequate. The police have no training in forensic science and lack the necessary resources for judicial investigation and supervision (Jalloh, 2018).

In summary, people living with disabilities have to be acknowledged, and their ability to contribute to economic growth taken into account. The government should endeavour to promote positive attitudes of societal perceptions for disabled people through sensitization to prevent an unintended negative outcome. Disability within the justice framework should work towards respecting the rights, needs, and equity treatments of people with disabilities. There should be appropriate legal and institutional frameworks that establish prerogative clearly and transparently, which will ensure that disabled people be able to obtain redress in case of violation of their rights. From the perspective of Critical Disability Theory, the state governments can augment the services offered to them while modifying laws that demonstrate the superiority of non-disabled people. An Act to ensure a barrier-free Sierra Leone should be instituted and introduced in the Parliament to make it official. Even though a great deal of improving the welfare of people with disabilities in the country has taken place, especially to advance the rights of persons with disabilities in Sierra Leone, there are no laws and privileges awarded to people living with disabilities. Moreover, there is more room for improvement both present and future, as the number of people with disabilities continues to rise. However, there is hope for optimism.

Based on this conclusion, the following recommendations are imperative:

- Sierra Leone police services, with the support of government agencies and international partners, should produce more detailed statistics broken down by race, age, and sex of victims and offenders. It helps police identify and determine the impact of crime on the most vulnerable groups in the community. The police should also redouble their efforts to

make crime statistics available to the public without complicated procedures and restrictions (Akinsulure et al. 2018).

- The government should double funding for the police to enable it to increase training for police officers, especially on how to promote justice and equity for citizens of society.
- The SLP should redouble its efforts to build trust in the countryside and increase the incidence of crime and public prosecution outside Freetown.
- Independent complaints review board (ICRB) should be established in each community to improve community relations and police. Civil society should be closely involved in monitoring citizens' police abuse and official methods such as police committees or police control teams should be put in place.
- Increase funding for civil society groups and governments to improve judicial oversight and finalize ordinary or illegal courts for serious crimes.
- The government should pass laws on sexual offences that increase the protection of victims of sexual violence by increasing the age of rape from 14 to 18 under the Rape Act. Besides, it should be punished. (Lahai & Lahai, 2018).
- Visioning changes needed from the social context should focus mainly on addressing issues of poverty and ableism. The government should vigorously engage in ensuring discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities. People should desist from systemic exclusion and oppression of people with disabilities. The idea that people with disabilities require fixing and are defined by their disability should be discouraged as negative systemic stigmatization. All lives matter, regardless of their status.

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